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LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.

FRANCE.

IT IS unnecessary to repeat the criticism which I have already given of the latest remarkable work of M. TH. RIBOT, *La Psychologie des Sentiments*. I desire merely to call attention to the approved merits of his method, to his steadfastness in adhering to one point of view and in supporting his conclusions upon a few dominating ideas, whose ramifications he unerringly follows, and finally to the decision which he evinces in his criticism of the numerous theories that come in his path, and between which he is obliged to choose.

To abide as rigidly as possible by the naked statement of facts, to strive constantly to single out the simple and primitive from the complex and secondary, such is the maxim followed by M. Ribot. Evolution supplies him with his instrument of analysis—the sound principle that all the luxuriant embroidery of higher life has been raised upon the canvas background of fundamental tendencies. And as these tendencies, which are the very basis of our being, are manifested in movement, the motor element can serve us in the construction of a theory of the great psychological facts.

Conformably to this conception M. Ribot does not hesitate to declare that the motor manifestations are the essential thing in the sphere of sentiment, that “what are called agreeable or painful states constitute but the superficial portion of affective life, the lowermost element of which reposes on tendencies, appetites, needs, desires, which are translated by movements.” The doctrine thus clearly formulated serves him as a guiding thread in all his studies,

whether he is dealing with subjects of general psychology (pleasure and pain, emotion and affective memory) or whether he is engaged with subjects of special psychology, such as the instinct of preservation, sympathy, the sexual instinct, social and moral instincts or religious, æsthetical, and intellectual sentiments.

M. Ribot has given us a motor theory of *attention*. He will give us later perhaps a motor theory of *imagination*. We hope it will be permitted him to explore in this manner the whole domain of psychology. In any event, he will have left upon this department of inquiry a strong impress, will have cleared up many obscure problems, and generally advanced solutions even where it has not been his lot to discover them definitively.

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But yesterday the miracle of the world was *life*, to-day it is *consciousness*. The physiologists, and with them Claude Bernard, had regarded life as an irreducible property; afterwards it was sought to reduce it to terms of physics and chemistry, and one is inclined to think that the problem has been approximately solved after having read the extremely valuable work of M. F. LE DANTEC, *Théorie nouvelle de la vie*. M. Le Dantec progressively studies the life of monoplastidules, or elementary life, then that of polyplastidules, or life properly so called, and concludes with a few pages upon psychic life. I cannot enter into the details of this work. It will be sufficient to emphasise the clear and new views of the author on life and death, and to mention the two principal conclusions of his book: (1) that psychic life is an epiphenomenon of physiological life, all things going forward physiologically as if consciousness did not exist at all; and (2) that in everything affecting the senses of observing living beings there is nothing transcending the natural laws established for gross matter, that is to say, the laws of physics and chemistry. M. Le Dantec is free from all dogmatism. His work will no doubt be widely noticed by biologists and philosophers.

I should make good an omission which I have made of an interesting volume by M. A. SABATIER, *Essai sur l'immortalité au point*

*de vue du naturalisme évolutioniste.*¹ The difficulty of the spiritualist conceptions regarding the survival of the ego has, as we know, always been the "realising," or the infusing of palpable life into, the soul, which at the same time it is sought to make immaterial and virtual, and to keep one and indivisible. M. Sabatier has sought to transcend this obstacle by imagining an ultra-terrestrial plasma as the physical vehicle of immortality. This plasma would be at once matter and space, life and spirit; the nervous centres would play with respect to it the rôle of accumulators, or condensers, creating conscious personality, and this personality once created could be affixed after death to a new organism capable of maintaining its integrity and even of increasing its energy.

The hypothesis of an ultra-terrestrial plasma is interesting, but it is not easy to conceive what would become of the diffuse psychical states which are imagined apart from all conscious subjects, nor how consciousness, if it depends on the association of nervous elements, could survive their dissociation.

There has also been much talk of two works by M. A. DE ROCHAS, *L'extériorisation de la sensibilité* and *L'extériorisation de la motricité.*² The experiments which are mentioned in these works should not be confounded with the "miracles" performed in the séances of the spiritists. M. de Rochas is a man of worth and an inquirer of sincerity. Nevertheless, he does not take sufficient precautions against suggestion and fraud. I have recently learned from well-informed persons, that his celebrated subject, his medium, had—after imbibing—revealed some of his methods. M. de Rochas himself has exposed some of these impositions, but it does not appear that he has discovered them all. His facts have not been sufficiently corroborated to permit his hazarding the rearing of a structure thereon. Does this mean that one must deny without hearing, and that no properties of nervous energy remain to be discovered? Not at all. We have simply to leave certain questions open, so as not to adopt precipitate and false solutions.

¹ Fishbacher, publisher.

² Chamuel, publisher. The remaining works are published by Felix Alcan.

A communication addressed to the Munich Congress by DR. BARADUC marks the beginning of a new order of researches, simultaneously pursued in Paris by a young scientist, M. RADEL, concerning whose work our journals published last August some brief mention. M. Baraduc flatters himself that he has photographed thought, and M. Radel that he has photographed dreams. That is to say, photography is said to have revealed to them the fact that there exist modes of exchanging nervous energy with the external environment, and also particular forms of the discharge of that energy. We are in the way here, should these doubtful facts be true, of not only giving precise material and form to intelligence, but of more proximately grasping the physiological fact corresponding to the psychological operation.

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M. DE ROBERTY gives us the first volume of his *Ethique, Le Bien et le Mal*,—an interesting work, as are all those of this author, both by its contents and its signification in the philosophical whole to which it belongs. It is less a systematically constructed book than a series of controversial articles, in which the enthusiasm of the writer breathes of the spirit of life, yet not without the sacrifice of lucidity. M. de Roberty predicates with many others the relativity of morals and pronounces future “immorality” as a benefaction. The term immorality signifies here, so far as I can understand, nothing but the end of special systems of morals, which are an obstacle to evolution, and not the end of all norms and of all authority. To every social organisation there corresponds, of necessity, an organisation of ideas and emotions which is morality itself. And it is thus that ethics is modified, but not without the establishment in the course of evolution of principles which thenceforth become, as I have elsewhere shown, the axis about which a new society grows up.

But we touch here the kernel of M. Roberty's book. He has proposed to answer mainly two questions: first, what is the place of morals with respect to biology, with respect to psychology, and with respect to sociology. Secondly, of the moral fact and social fact, which is prior?

To biology, he concludes, rudimentary psychism belongs ; to sociology collective psychism, the study of which will take up the second volume of his *Ethique*. The florescence of life—religion, philosophy, science, and art—is not entirely due to the normal evolution of biological psychism ; it results from the fusion of purely vital energies and of social forces derived from the biological order. Psychology, accordingly, would not be an abstract science (a science of *being*), taking rank after cerebral physiology ; but it would be a concrete discipline (a science of *becoming*), a body of knowledge derived from the two conjoint sciences of biology and sociology.

As to the moral facts and the social facts it is to be said that the first engender the second rather than that they are derived from them. The social facts are the form in which the moral facts are clothed ; in reality we have here the same order of phenomena, subject to a continuous evolution, in which, however, we must distinguish two aspects, the moral, which is within, and the social, which is without. I find nothing to object to in this conception. It has seemed to me clear for a long time that the same needs have given rise to society simultaneously with morality ; that the development of both has proceeded upon the basis of our fundamental organic tendencies ; and finally, that sociology is always broader than historical systems of morality, so that the latter constantly tend to conform to the former, and the psychological states of social individuals, that is to say, ends or duties, to agree more and more exactly with one another, instead of becoming antagonistic.

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M. LOUIS COUTURAT, who gives us a book on *L'Infini mathématique*, is certainly a scholarly and distinguished author, yet one of a class in whom philosophical studies have strangely warped the geometrical spirit. His object has been to prove, as before him others have sought to do, that we can think and comprehend the infinite although it is not representable. He has sought this proof by a criticism of the data of mathematical analysis. But he commits in my judgment two fundamental errors. The first is the mistaking of the true nature of arithmetic. Arithmetic is a mere instrument of precision, the perfecting of which, as determined by

its application to complex questions and as pushed higher and higher by necessity, are recorded in history by the successive consideration of irrational numbers, imaginary numbers, limits, etc. It is not permissible to ascribe to the artifices which support it a mysterious value, or to attempt to objectify and hypostatise the purely logical conceptions which analysis has introduced into thought.

The second error is the attributing a special efficacy to magnitude, such that analysis is made to repose upon the idea of *magnitude* and not upon the idea of *number*. As if magnitude signified anything, so long as it remains undetermined, that is, unexpressed by means of numbers, which are the precise elements of its determination !

Cannot M. Couturat see that his induction ultimately leads to quite arbitrary changes in the true signification of words, and that the infinite which he has in mind and seeks to demonstrate is not at all the mathematical infinite ?

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I hasten on to the new publication of M. J. STRADA, *Jésus et l'ère de la science, la véritable histoire de Jésus*, and I take this occasion of calling the attention of my readers to the author himself, who is a philosopher by nature. M. Strada has had the singular fortune of passing his life almost entirely neglected by the official philosophical public, although he has published more than twenty books on philosophy, social science, and history, not to mention an enormous poetical work, *L'Epopée humaine*, which already embraces nineteen volumes. He undoubtedly owes the neglect which he has brought upon himself—if it can be called such—to the strange forms of his language and to the intricate style of his dialectics. I say that he has been neglected ; I do not say that he has been overlooked or ignored. He has himself claimed priority for the theory of *idées-forces*, which M. Fouillée developed with such talent and originality.

Twenty years ago I read the *Ultimum Organum* of M. Strada, which had appeared ten years previously. I was struck with the work and spoke of it in my first modest and imperfect maiden effort.

Quite recently I reviewed in the *Revue Philosophique* another work by the same author, *La loi de l'histoire*, and I could not help remarking the agreement of Strada's law with that of Comte. M. Strada explains history, as did Comte, by intelligence; and the sequence of the methods of mind established by him—fideism, with faith as its criterion, rationalism with evidence, and impersonalism with facts—recalls the three ages, the theological, metaphysical, and positive, of his predecessor. M. Strada has made a novel and felicitous point where he reproaches positivism and modern science with having accepted experiment as a criterion, a thing which is for him merely a methodological instrument. The proper criterion, he contends, is found neither in experiment, in the syllogism, nor in mathematics, which are a simple means of reaching facts; it is found in the *Fact* alone. It is the *Necessary Fact* which is the criterion, not fluctuating and changing man, and hence the name of methodological impersonalism, or of the impersonal method, which he has given to his doctrine.

Yet the fact, one will say, is the very thing that experiment seeks to disclose. And the confusion is not as great as M. Strada imagines. It is true that in declaring experiment to be the criterion, we are in danger of excluding all metaphysics from knowledge, and the syllogism alone, according to M. Strada, reaches the metaphysical fact which he wishes to restore. There is a broad field for discussion regarding the scope ascribed by him to the syllogism and regarding his handling of the antinomies which leads him to affirm God to be the Pre-antinomic. But this discussion would be at present beyond our scope, and I return to the *Jésus* which I mentioned above. The work is large and interesting. Many people will be offended by it, and yet the restoration of the true history of Jesus which M. Strada attempts, taking his stand solely on the text of the Gospels, directly and respectfully consulted, appears to me an extremely probable one. Nothing is more striking than the sureness and frankness with which the author substitutes what he calls the fact-mediator for the deified mediators, such as Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed, that is to say, a religion of science for fideisms of all sorts. M. Strada will finish this work in a new

volume, "The Religion of Science," which will certainly rank among the most interesting. An eloquent and convinced writer, with a zeal amounting almost to passion, he not only impresses and moves his public but also forces them to think. He knows philosophy as it is not known now-a-days, and handles language with an energy far above the ordinary. Although I do not give my full adhesion to his doctrine, I am ready to render him this homage and to bring his work to the attention of readers who doubtless are unaware of his existence.

LUCIEN ARRÉAT.

PARIS.